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The Power of Desire in Selected Plays by Henrik Ibsen

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The Power of Desire
in Selected Plays by Henrik Ibsen

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13 June 2002

Abstract

This thesis explores how desire operates in selected plays by the Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen. I will argue that desire acts as a motivating force, urging the characters to seek fulfilment in their ideals, resulting in both defeat and triumph.

The four plays considered, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady From the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder*, depict characters that are unable to sustain ordinary existence. This inability produces equivocal and contradictory human emotions that both restrict and impel the characters as they journey toward their downfall and salvation. The ambiguous nature of these four plays is examined in order to demonstrate how desire creates contradictory character relationships and conclusions.

The often prohibitive society that the motivated individual inhabits is also considered, as landscape and environment confine the individual, preventing satisfaction of the desire for an idealistic life. However, this thesis will demonstrate that the individual also engenders limitations, as their own inadequacies obstruct the vision of a perfect existence.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature



Date: 13 June 2002

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Introduction

“Sublime, painful fortune – to struggle for the unattainable!”

(written in Emilie Bardach’s album by Henrik Ibsen, September 20, 1889, from *Ibsen: Letters and Speeches*, 279).

This seemingly paradoxical statement embodies the essence of desire and its consequences, as depicted in the four plays that this thesis examines. Desire is an all-consuming and motivating force, eliciting contradictory emotions and feelings of sublime pain and pleasure, triumph and defeat, for to desire is to struggle and long for the unattainable. This thesis analyses the recurring theme of longing for the unattainable and how this desire that drives human beings is forced to be acknowledged against a backdrop of limitation, cowardice, guilt and autocracy.

In order to comprehend the notion of desire that these plays communicate, one must realise the significance of the difference between desire and need. Jaques Lacan’s proposal of distinction will be utilised in order to project this differentiation: “The phenomenology that emerges from analytic experience is certainly of a kind to demonstrate in desire the paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, even scandalous character by which it is distinguished from need” (286). Desire differs from need because the nature of desire is to demand what one wishes, whereas need suggests necessity, or requirement. It is not out of necessity that Ibsen’s characters are obsessed with desire and longing, but a result of the human characteristic to strive for what lies beyond, and to achieve this at any cost.

Inevitably, the characters face limitations that prevent fulfilment, limitations that, this thesis argues, both society and the individual impose. The notion of female individuality is especially pertinent when discussing societal limitations, as the characters Rebecca West, Ellida Wangel, Hedda Gabler and Hilde Wangel are longing to live a life on their own terms, one that is fulfilling and complete. Such a quest results in salvation and destruction, as these women attempt to change the environment they inhabit, an environment fabricated by society and themselves.

The plays that this thesis investigates are dramatic portraits of the human condition and the forces that corrupt, distort and motivate human beings to act. The central

characters are motivated and consumed by desire and the need for satisfaction, a quest that few characters fulfil, whilst others are destroyed by the unrelenting pursuit of achieving the impossible. The first play discussed is *Rosmersholm*, a portrayal of sexual desire and the longing for self-completion. But the desires of the characters are opposed against an atmosphere vested in tradition and guilt for past actions, essentially immobilising the characters' ability to move forward in freedom and procure what they desire. *The Lady From the Sea* confirms the inherent ability to actualise desires, as the central character Ellida affirms her position and place in her husband's home, whilst in contrast, Bolette seemingly opts to endure the obligation of female duty and inequality, as she agrees to marry a man that she does not love. This chapter, however, argues that such implied assumptions can be disputed, demonstrating the effective ambiguity of the denouement. *Hedda Gabler* illustrates the fate of a woman so inspired, yet incensed by her desire for freedom, that her creative energy becomes inverted as she begins on a violent path to destruction. The environment that Hedda inhabits is one that favours and honours familial and domestic life, a life that Hedda strictly opposes. But Hedda's cowardice and ultimate fear of scandal disables her desire for freedom, resulting in her own death and that of her unborn child. *The Master Builder* promises the fulfilment of desired success and passion, seemingly destroyed by the master builder's fatal fall. This sordid end is, however, also portrayed in a light that suggests the possibility of triumph and satisfaction.

Such ambiguity is an apparent feature of these specific plays, as preconceptions and assumptions of human nature are masterfully thrown into disarray, demonstrating the irrepressible power of desire. The plays depict the common desire to live one's ideal existence and transcend limitations. But as the plays progress and near their conclusion, the characters' desires are obstructed and contradicted by human emotions of guilt, love and cowardice. The quest for satisfaction is both glorious and treacherous, illustrating the ambiguous nature of desire, as the characters struggle in a world bound by contradictions.

Being unable to read Norwegian, I have had to rely on English translations of the original texts. This results in an inevitable loss of specific cultural meanings, but the plays still retain great power and subtlety, even in their English forms. I have employed *The Oxford Ibsen* collection, translated by James McFarlane and Jens Arup, for English translations of the plays, believing that this edition proves a most accessible text with a

lively vernacular language. An intense analysis of various English translations is beyond the scope of this thesis, therefore I have chosen a comparative example of McFarlane and the contemporary translator Rolf Fjelde, in order to demonstrate the assiduity of McFarlane's translation. The following lines of dialogue are from Fjelde's translation of *The Master Builder* at the end of Act Two:

Oh, come on, Mr. Solness! You said I'd be a princess - and you'd give me a kingdom. So you went and - well? (363).

McFarlane's version differs slightly when Hilde addresses Solness:

For shame, master builder! You said I was to be a princess. That you would give me a kingdom. And then you took me and...Well! (421).

McFarlane develops a consistent portrayal of what the name 'master builder' means to Hilde when referring to Solness by his professional title rather than simply his surname. This reinforces the link between the action of the play and the conclusion when Hilde cries out "My...my...master builder!"(McFarlane, 445). This attention to the dramatic function of the language is a characteristic of McFarlane's translation.

The characters who desire the unattainable, whether it be self-knowledge, a place to belong to, freedom or immortality and passion, will inevitably endure a journey of suffering and sensuality, fulfilment and discontent. For, essentially, to desire is to strive for the ideal existence, to attempt to gain access to a happier, more fulfilling life. But as this thesis demonstrates, the longing to know what lies beyond simple existence generates desire as an intense and often destructive force.

Chapter One

Rosmersholm

The desire for freedom recurs in the four plays that this thesis examines, but it is in *Rosmersholm* that freedom through self-knowledge is desperately sought. Desire, as a sexual force, also plays a dominant role in shaping the dramatic events of *Rosmersholm*, for it is sexual desire that determines how the characters interact with and react to each other. Desire and the past are closely connected in this text, as the consequences of past actions are revisited upon the present.

It is the three characters Rosmer, Rebecca and Beata who constitute, what Hardwick terms, the “Rosmersholm Triangle” (69). Significantly, Beata is dead when the play begins yet her role in the triangle is consistent, for it is via the physically absent Beata that Rosmer and Rebecca’s future is determined. It is the other characters in the play that define the image of the troubled Beata; “a sick unhappy woman of unsound mind” (324), “desperately in need of care and friendly sympathy” (297), whilst Mortensgaard suggests that perhaps Beata was not mentally unstable as assumed (336). These images of the deceased Beata govern how Rosmer and Rebecca view their own actions and consequences. Both Rebecca and Rosmer consistently declare that Beata was mentally ill, a desperately unhappy woman who found her only release in suicide (324). However, it becomes evident that such declarations are in fact a shield for overwhelming desire and longing.

Rebecca arrived at Rosmersholm with clear intentions, to take over the role of mentor from Ulrik Brendel, and to go forward in freedom with Rosmer. She desires a mind free from scruples, to be liberated in thought and deed, a quest that Rebecca thought could be fulfilled at Rosmersholm. However, as Bradbrook states, “Rebecca had strength of will, power of fascination, but no knowledge of herself” (114). Rebecca’s initial desire to emancipate Rosmer becomes secondary to the need to discover her self, as the inherent lack of self-knowledge compels Rebecca to angle for admission to Rosmersholm and commit ruthless acts of deceit to maintain her position there.

Chaudhuri proposes that in search of self-actualisation, one must discover “what kind of place will best nurture and support selfhood” (69), a place where the individual

feels a sense of belonging and stability. This notion of discovering a place that nurtures and supports is further developed in Chapter Two via Luce Irigaray's theories about masculine and feminine interaction. The dubious circumstances that surround Rebecca's birth imply that Rebecca does not 'belong' anywhere or to anyone. The only home that Rebecca has known is with Dr. West, who she apparently never assumed was her actual father, always believing that she had no familial connections, with nothing to be passed on to her except "a case full of books" (355-56). Rebecca knows nothing of her past, her self, and what she did believe is suddenly challenged by Kroll's accusations. The desire to liberate the mind of Johannes Rosmer is subverted by Rebecca's overwhelming desire to belong.

For Rebecca, the woman without a definitive past or place to belong to, Rosmersholm seems the perfect location to settle, as it is steeped in the ancestry of past generations, held in high regard and esteem. The Rosmer home represents stability and history, evident from the first moments of the play as the stage directions state that the "*walls are hung with past and recent portraits of clergymen, officers and officials in their robes and uniforms*" with "*an avenue of ancient trees leading to the estate*" (293). Hardwick suggests that

[Rebecca's] plans for an enlargement of views, for free-thinking joyousness and life-giving openness are merely longings of her personal temperament that have been ground into dust by poverty, lack of connections, the absence of any security or hope. What good does it do her to be a "new woman" until she has properly settled herself somewhere? (78).

Finding a place to belong to and settle is paramount for Rebecca, for it is in the stable life Rosmersholm offers that Rebecca believes her desire to emancipate herself and Rosmer, and consequently, "a new generation of happy and noble men" (372), will be satisfied. Attempting to satisfy such a desire for freedom requires strength of will and determination- Rebecca's most resolute qualities. This factor is emphasised when taking advantage of her connection with headmaster Kroll.

The past relationship between Kroll and Rebecca was evidently one of intimate rapport, as Kroll accuses Rebecca of manipulating him and their relationship to gain a position at Rosmersholm:

I'm no longer such a fool as to imagine you cared anything for me the way you carried on. All you wanted was to get your foot in at Rosmersholm. Get yourself established here. That's what I was supposed to help you with. I can see it all now (353).

It appears that Rebecca manipulated her association with Kroll, as she later admits to Rosmer: "it's perfectly true I angled for admission here to Rosmersholm" (368), believing that she would succeed in doing well for *herself*. In the face of confrontation Rebecca insists that it was Beata who "begged and prayed" (354) her to come and stay at Rosmersholm, an appeal accounted for by Kroll as Rebecca's ability to bewitch (354). Rebecca may in fact possess some ability to beguile and lure that which she desires, noted in Brendel's reference to her as an "enchanted little mermaid" (375), and her own confession that she will be a "sea-troll" (379) that drags the ship which will sail Rosmer to nobility and freedom. But it may have been the desperate plea from Beata that ultimately convinced Rebecca to go to Rosmersholm, as to be needed and idolised is exactly what Rebecca desired most. For if she had not come to Rosmersholm to assist and befriend the unhappy Beata, Rebecca states, "what else would I have to live for?" (297).

The belief that Rosmersholm will nurture Rebecca's desire, the desire to belong, is slowly infected and shattered during her years there. When Kroll asks Rebecca if she will be staying at Rosmersholm permanently, she responds, "I have become so used to the place now, I almost feel I belong here" (227). Rebecca may "almost" belong to Rosmersholm, but she will never belong completely, for Rosmersholm is exactly what the name suggests: the home of the Rosmers, the significance of which Kroll takes the liberty to reiterate:

The Rosmers of Rosmersholm...clergymen and soldiers...high officials...men of the highest principles, all of them...the foremost family in the district with its seat here now for nearly two hundred years. [*Lays his hand on Rosmer's*

shoulder.] Rosmer, you owe it to yourself and the traditions of your family to join in the fight to defend those things that have hitherto been held sacred in our community (305).

But Rebecca responds to this affirmation of the Rosmer name by declaring how ludicrous Kroll's adulation sounds. Rebecca will never understand completely the strength of the Rosmer tradition and how morals have been enforced in the Rosmer home for generations, a point that Rosmer appears to recognise only too well when he recalls the import of the Rosmer title, "Oh, the family name..." (305). Rosmersholm is not merely a home, it is an institution devoted to morality and tradition, with ancestral roots that determine the Rosmer philosophy. Rebecca makes such a poignant statement that describes the strength of the Rosmer way of life, when she is defending her motives for lying about her age:

There's always some little thing or other that sticks and you just can't shake yourself free of it. It's just the way we are made (356).

The Rosmer philosophy can not be shaken; Rosmer's desire to liberate his mind and the lives of common men will never be actualised in the "house-prison" (Chaudhuri, 52) that Rosmersholm embodies. The "house-prison" permits security and shelter, yet simultaneously traps and stifles its inhabitants, producing a claustrophobic atmosphere (Chaudhuri, 52). This definition aptly pertains to Rosmersholm and its ability to create morally elevated generations, through security of place and historical connections, whilst concurrently dissolving the desires and longings of the inhabitants via guilt and the compulsion to atone.

The themes of guilt and atonement perform a most significant role in determining the actions and reactions of the characters. Much guilt surrounds the relationship between Rosmer and Rebecca, as they each repeatedly insist that they are free from contrition and unaccountable for Beata's death, an element established when Rosmer says to Kroll:

We were both so devoted to her. And both Reb...both Miss West and I, we know ourselves that we did everything in our power for the poor thing in her affliction. We have nothing to reproach ourselves with (300).

But it is this constant insistence of innocence that reflects the guilt these characters are experiencing. Kroll's absence at Rosmersholm leads Rosmer and Rebecca to fear that Kroll may believe Rebecca has usurped Beata's place; "it wouldn't really be very surprising if it upset you to see a stranger like me running things here at Rosmersholm" (297), she tells him. But, evidently, Rebecca's position does not bother Kroll, as she discovers, "It was just our imagination" (299). It is Rosmer and Rebecca's guilt for their passionate desire that has propelled their imagination, for they cannot move forward in freedom when their latent guilt for the past prevents them.

When Rosmer discovers that Beata committed suicide so he could be free to be with Rebecca, he begins to doubt that the relationship between him and Rebecca is one of 'friendship'. Rosmer admits that he longed for and desired Rebecca, even while Beata was still alive. But this desire for Rebecca does not erupt as a sexual force, rather, Rosmer terms their life together a "spiritual marriage" (351), that their love began like "two children falling sweetly and secretly in love" (351). The desire he feels for Rebecca is the desire for a companion, for "serene contentment" (351), as opposed to the "wild, uncontrollable passion" (369) that Rebecca felt for Rosmer when their relationship began. This ardent desire is why Rebecca struggles to answer Rosmer's question about their 'pure' and spiritual relationship, as he asks, "Didn't you also feel that way about it?" (351). As Rebecca later admits, their relationship grew from sexual desire, a desire that created determination and led to the exploitation of others. But Rebecca never expressed her sexual desire for Rosmer, rather, she repressed such feelings till she could find contentment and peace in their life together - a result of the Rosmersholm philosophy.

It is the Rosmersholm philosophy of life that has ennobled Rebecca, whilst simultaneously infecting the strength of will that motivated her to find a place at Rosmersholm. The strength of will, that Rebecca claims has been contaminated by Rosmersholm, is represented in the play as a contradictory force. Rosmersholm is the necessary place for Rebecca to gain self-actualisation and knowledge, but it must be

Rebecca's will that pushes her toward fulfilment. Yet Rosmersholm and the strength of will are two naturally opposing forces, as Rosmersholm portrays the continuity of tradition and morality, whilst the human will represents the ability to accomplish desire at any cost. But the Rosmersholm ethos is stronger than the desire to be free, as Rebecca becomes ennobled and realises the significance of her past actions and how they act as a barrier to the happiness that Rebecca thought she deserved: to be Rosmer's wife.

In persuading Beata to suicide, Rebecca acted for Rosmer by choosing the life that *she* believed was worth living. If Rebecca could release Rosmer from the "gloom of a marriage" (360) that she believed he was trapped in, she could occupy the place of . . . dead wife, allowing Rosmer and Rebecca "to go forward together in freedom" (360). The will that drove Rebecca to make this decision is an "urgent spirit" (371) struggling for freedom, now paralysed by Rosmersholm:

My will power has been sapped, my spirit crippled. Once I dared tackle anything that came my way; now that time is gone. I have lost the power to act, Johannes (370).

Rebecca looks upon her past actions as determined and courageous because she fought for Rosmer's salvation, never swerving in her pursuit of satisfied desire. By fighting for Rosmer's independence, Rebecca hoped to create a free man, ready to ennobel and be the leader of emancipated men, but Rosmer is not the messenger of freedom that Rebecca took him for. It is precisely because Rebecca has created Rosmer and instilled the ideal of emancipation in him that he cannot be the one to lead the common men to freedom. The character of Ulrik Brendel emphasises how Rosmer is inclined to adopt the thoughts of others, as it was his tutor Brendel who "crammed [Rosmer's] head full of revolutionary ideas" (306). When Brendel moved on, Rebecca admits that she came to Rosmersholm to fill the void that was now left and further encourage ideas of liberation.

In order to aid discussion of the notion that emancipation of the individual is hindered when influenced by another, Foucault's text *The Care of the Self* and the relevant theories will be considered. This text focuses on the notion of 'returning to the self' and cultivating the soul; not in isolation, but by relating to and aiding others in a reciprocal

manner on a social level (53). This relation with others develops a "system of reciprocal obligations" (54), allowing the individual to nurture the self in a correlative environment. Rosmer portrays such a return to the self as he informs Kroll,

I am no supporter of any prevailing doctrine, nor indeed of either side in the dispute. I want to try to bring men together from all sides. As many and as sincerely, as I can. I will devote my life and all my strength to this one thing: to create a true democracy in this land (314).

This longing to help his countrymen realise their worth and potential to be liberated and purified will allow Rosmer to experience a freedom and pleasure of spirit not experienced in the Rosmer household as far as tradition states. After confronting Kroll with his democratic ideas, Rosmer admits to Rebecca that "I can't remember feeling as light-hearted as this for a long time" (319), demonstrating that in gaining self-realisation he feels content and at peace with his self. The theories that Foucault has developed about the self seem most pertinent when deliberating Rosmer's feelings of elation, as he reasons that

The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is, for himself, an object of pleasure. This pleasure is defined by the fact of not being caused by anything that is independent of ourselves and therefore escapes our control (66).

Foucault points out that while the context of attaining self-realisation is a social one, the pleasure found in the self must be formed by the self, and not by any forces external to the individual. The question that must be posed at this point is, has Rosmer and his self-realisation been influenced and determined by forces outside of himself; by Rebecca's own desire for freedom?

The relationship between Rosmer and Rebecca is obviously very close, evident when Rosmer states, "we two have advanced together, trusting in each other" (323). Yet on further examination it appears that this companionship is not as equal as Rosmer assumes, for it seems that it is Rebecca's desire to belong that facilitates Rosmer's thoughts of

liberation. By controlling and influencing what Rosmer thinks, Rebecca can feel like she belongs; her life suddenly has a purpose as she encourages Rosmer to advance toward freedom with her. In Act One, Rebecca urges Rosmer to tell Kroll about his apostasy and the new ideas that he has formed:

REBECCA. [*goes over to Rosmer and speaks quickly in a low voice so that Kroll does not hear*]. Go on, do it!

ROSMER. [*in the same tone*]. Not tonight.

REBECCA. [*as before*]. Yes, do it now! (302).

Rebecca's insistence emphasises the strength of her will, as she suggests that Rosmer tell Kroll about his new decisions, immediately after Kroll has announced that his own family has turned against him. Rosmer is considerably disturbed by this news, stating, "I would never have dreamt such a thing...to *you*...in your own house..." (301). For Rosmer understands the strength of family ties and traditions after being raised at Rosmersholm, but Rebecca only knows that to satisfy her desire to belong she must execute control and strength by influencing Rosmer to stand beside her in the fight for democracy. Rosmer cannot move forward in freedom and ennoble the common man, because Rebecca has influenced this mission. Rosmer realises this when he accuses Rebecca of manipulating him, "You thought that *you* yourself might be able to do something with your life; and that maybe you could utilise me for your own ends; you thought I might serve you somehow in your schemes" (368). Therefore, pleasure and self-actualisation elude Rosmer because he now holds the belief that his quest for freedom and happiness has been manipulated and determined by Rebecca's own desires, a belief that Rebecca devotes and sacrifices her life to disprove.

The Rosmersholm way of life restrains its inhabitants from freedom: freedom of thought and freedom from guilt. Rosmer will never be free from the guilty thoughts that plague his mind, "I'll never be able to shake them off" (350). Only in death can Rosmer, and Rebecca, be redeemed for their past motives and actions.

Redemption and purification are discovered in a death that "is for love, a deliberate death coming at the end of a series of ordeals; a death that means transfiguration, and is in

no way the result of some violent chance" (de Rougement, 45). Rebecca and Rosmer embrace their fatal end wholeheartedly; their leap into the millstream is not accidental. But is this fateful leap a triumph, an affirmation of pure love, or a defeatist climax embroiled with distrust and revenge? Errol Durbach contends in his essay, "Temptation to Err: The Denouement of Rosmersholm", that Rebecca and Rosmer "die for the right reasons: to affirm love and joy in the meeting of two independent spirits, neither dominating the other, neither submitting to the demands of the other, neither dying as a sacrificial lure to the other" (484). Durbach's argument is most accurate when discussing the final lines of the play and the spiritual wedding that takes place. Both characters believe that they go to their deaths as one, yet Rebecca's question to Rosmer, "is it you who goes with me, or I with you" (380), throws a very different light on the romantic ideal that their suicide implies.

Ulrik Brendel enters at the moment that Rosmer is calling for proof of Rebecca's love, and states that Rosmer will be assured of success in his mission to ennoble only if

the woman who loves him goes out into the kitchen and chops off her dainty, pink and white little-finger...*here*, just near the middle joint. Furthermore, that the aforesaid woman in love...equally gladly...cuts off her incomparably formed left ear. [*Lets her go and turns to ROSMER.*] Farewell, my conquering Johannes (376).

This idea of sacrifice that Brendel speaks of consumes Rosmer as he asks Rebecca to 'gladly' go the way Beata went (378). By asking this of Rebecca he is manipulating her guilt and remorse for past actions, insisting that she does not have the courage or the devotion that Beata had, as Rosmer asserts, "You dare not do what *she* dared" (378). Admittedly it is Rebecca's ultimate choice to end her life, yet it appears that Rebecca has been manipulated by Rosmer's reference to the devotion of his past wife into a position of compliance. Does Rebecca follow Rosmer to her death as a means of alleviating the distrust that has surrounded their relationship, knowing that the promises of devotion and ennoblement are "empty phrases" (379)? The final words of the play, spoken by Mrs. Helseth, "the dead woman has taken them" (381), suggest the double suicide is a final

means of atonement, as Rosmer and Rebecca judge their own actions and see their deaths as a purification of their past.

A conclusive reading of the final scene proves impossible, as the characters' contradictory words and actions generate multiple intentions for the double suicide. Rebecca's need to belong and, most significantly, her sexual desire for Rosmer, lead to her inevitable destruction as de Rougement acknowledges, in the history of romance "passion means suffering" (15). For passion is not satisfied love, but an unwarranted emotion destined to cause pain and suffering, rather than end with marriage and happiness. The desire for self-completion and fulfilment is depicted in *Rosmersholm* as a dangerously encompassing force, motivating ruthless and selfish acts, whilst simultaneously encouraging the self to discover passion and purpose.

Chapter Two

The Lady From the Sea

The landscape of the world as an oppressive and stifling, yet vast and wondrous force, is closely aligned with the characters and their desires in *The Lady From the Sea*. The central character Ellida is motivated to question her status in the home of her husband and his children when she becomes dissatisfied with her life and dreams of her past lover and his affiliation with the sea.

Arthur Ganz suggests that the search for the ideal is driven by discontent (150), a pursuit for fulfilment motivated by dissatisfaction with the limitations of environment and the human condition. This idea of dissatisfaction can be specifically applied to Ibsen's female characters and their discontent with surroundings and limitations, further discussed in the following chapter on *Hedda Gabler*. Ellida's discontent with her location amongst the mountains and fjords is emphasised by the themes of alienation and displacement, introduced via Ballested's painting of the mermaid who

has strayed in from the sea and can't find her way out again. So here she lies dying in the brackish water (30).

The parallel between Ballested's mermaid and Ellida is discovered when Wangel tells Arnholm how the people in town refer to Ellida as 'The Lady from the Sea', unable to understand her close affiliation with the sea and its rejuvenating powers (39). Ellida, like the mermaid, has drifted from her home by the sea and seems unable to acclimatise to her new surroundings amongst the mountains and fjords. It appears that Ellida is suffering from what Chaudhuri terms a "geopathic disorder" (58), her location causes suffering and despair as Ellida becomes sick from displacement and isolation from the sea, "dying in the brackish water" (30). Ellida has been 'transplanted' from her natural home by the sea to an environment that is overshadowed by the literal gloom of the mountains and the metaphorical shadow of human discontent and desire. It is this landscape of gloomy mountains and fjords, where the "water is sick" (39), that provokes Ellida's dissatisfaction

with her life with Wangel, and encourages her desire to discover a place that she can belong to.

Ellida's fascination with the sea and the creatures that find habitation there is paramount to understanding the desire for a secure place that consumes Ellida. The conversations about the sea creatures that Ellida shared with the Stranger illuminate how Ellida, like the creatures, needs a habitat that she can belong to, and feel serene and content in her location:

ELLIDA. But mostly we talked about whales and dolphins, and about the seals that lie out on the rocks in the warmth of the sun. And we talked about the gulls and the eagles and all the other sea birds. And you know...isn't it strange?...when we talked about such things I used to feel that he was somehow of the same kith and kin as these sea-creatures.

WANGEL. And you...?

ELLIDA. I too almost felt as though I was one of them (62).

The sea represents the wild and free elements of life, it is the "cradle of existence" (McFarlane, 278), a force that both terrifies and allures, and simultaneously nurtures and cripples life. As Lyngstrand states, "it was that shipwreck that gave me this little weakness...in the chest" (46). It is not only the sea that Ellida feels a deep connection to, but also the elements that others avoid, as Ellida insists that Amholm join her in the garden "where there is a little bit of a breeze" (40), rather than sit on the verandah that Wangel had decided was a cooler alternative. Such a seemingly insignificant difference between Ellida and the other characters sets up conflicting relationships within the family. The sense of belonging that Ellida derived from the sea and its vast environment is unable to be reproduced in the smothering atmosphere of the mountainous region that surrounds Wangel's home. The desire to discover a place to belong to and feel nurtured is further impelled by Ellida's relations with Wangel and his two children, Bolette and Hilde.

Ellida's exclusion from the family is evident from the beginning of the play, as Bolette and Hilde are preparing a celebration for their deceased mother's birthday, a celebration the girls and Wangel try to conceal from Ellida by insisting that the preparations

are in honour of Bolette's tutor, Arnholm. Rather than encourage Bolette and Hilde to accept Ellida as their new mother, Wangel allows the girls to celebrate the memory of their past mother, therefore positioning Ellida as an individual outside of the Wangel family:

What more natural than that we should want to keep her memory...She who has departed from us. All the same...No, girls...I don't like this. This way of doing it, I mean. This way we have every year of...Well, what shall we say! I suppose there's no other way of doing it (36).

Despite Wangel's apparent dislike for having to keep certain things from Ellida they continue as they have done every year, with such a time frame suggesting that Ellida has never been welcomed or received by the Wangel family during her "five or six years" (99) living there. In accepting the role of second wife, Ellida has distanced and isolated herself from those around her, as she feels that "I have been on the outside of everything, right from the very first moment" (108). Ellida confronts Wangel in Act Four claiming that she was 'bought' by Wangel because he could not bear the loneliness and emptiness of losing his wife, to which Wangel admits that he searched for not only a new wife but also "a new mother for my children" (98). Yet, throughout the play it does not seem that the role of mother is available to Ellida, as Dr. Wangel insists that intervening in affairs that concern the children, "isn't really anything for her" (91), whilst Bolette contemplates staying with her father because Ellida is

not very good at doing all the things Mother used to do so well. There are so many things this one doesn't even see. Or maybe doesn't want to see...or doesn't care. I don't know which it is (73).

Ellida cannot satisfy her desire to belong when there is no place offered to belong to. Ellida is not needed in this household; the role of mother is unavailable to her, thus, she has no essential role or responsibilities in this home. Ellida tells Wangel,

There is absolutely nothing to keep me. I have no roots in your house, Wangel. The children are not mine. What I mean is, I don't have their affection. Nor ever have had. I haven't even so much as a key to give up...or instructions to leave...about anything at all. I am completely without roots in your house (108).

Ellida's revelation signifies a want for responsibility, to have a sense of purpose in Wangel's home, essentially, to be needed. Ellida has not only been alienated from her natural and comforting home by the sea, but has arrived in an atmosphere that nurtures familial and territorial ties to the past. The environment where Doctor Wangel was "born and bred" (38) and shared so many happy moments with his now deceased wife, only breeds feelings of discontent in Ellida, motivating her to discover the place where she belongs and where her desire for self-actualisation can be satisfied.

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Luce Irigaray comments upon the difference between masculine and feminine sexualities, determining that the masculine "is attracted to the maternal-feminine as place" (39), whilst the masculine, in order to attract the feminine, must "constitute itself as a vessel to receive and welcome" (39). Irigaray reiterates that "if any meeting is to be possible between man and woman, each must be a place, as appropriate to and for the other, and toward which he or she may move" (40), 'place' understood as a container, somewhere that either the masculine or the feminine can be enveloped and nurtured in (34). The possibility that Wangel's home may be the place where Ellida belongs - "could *this* be where I am needed!" (104), where she can be responsible for her own actions - is clouded by Wangel's inability to constitute himself and his family as a nurturing and welcoming home for Ellida. Ellida tells Wangel,

I simply let everything stay the way I found it the day I arrived. You were the one...and you alone...who wanted it that way (108).

A connection or interdependent relationship cannot be formed between Wangel and Ellida when they are unwilling to create themselves as a 'place' for the other to belong to. Wangel suggests that Ellida move closer to the sea in order to alleviate her depression and

reunite her with the “open sky” and “keen, bracing winds” (59), that a life by the sea can offer. But Ellida insists that her health and peace of mind cannot be salvaged by a return to her past home (59), rather, Ellida wants Wangel to establish himself as a vessel where she can feel welcome and nurtured. To achieve this, Ellida and Wangel’s relationship must develop on equal terms, not on the authoritative level that their life together began on. But as Fuchs suggests, the male characters in the play “hold inflated, narcissistic views of male power in marriage” (438), unable to constitute a democratic relationship. Unaware of the paternalistic manner with which he treats Ellida, Wangel reproaches himself for not acting “more like a father to her” (92), never realising Ellida’s importance as a parental figure. He refers to Ellida as a “poor sick child” (92), making autocratic decisions that concern their future, concluding that they must relocate for Ellida’s benefit. But Ellida recognises the implications of such a rash decision, believing that a sudden move would only make Wangel unhappy (60). Wangel treats Ellida’s problems with a simple remedy one would offer to a child, declaring “this is now settled, I tell you” (59), portraying how their relationship operates with a communication level of parent and child, not the level of equality required to establish Wangel and his home as a ‘place’ for Ellida to belong to. Wangel suggests the remedy for Ellida’s constant depression when he proposes that they move to “a place where you can find a true home, a home after your own heart” (59). But Wangel does not practice his own prescription, as communication deficiency paralyses their relationship and the family bond.

Wangel’s incapacity to facilitate Ellida’s needs makes the Stranger’s offer to join him on the journey particularly appealing. Leigh notes that the Stranger has reserved a cabin for Ellida, a space of her own, “he is not asking her to fill a place that is already there, as Wangel had done, but has made arrangements for her to have her own” (128-29). The Stranger offers Ellida the opportunity to satisfy her desire for a secure place to belong to, by asking, “don’t you feel, as I do, that we belong to each other?” (119). Unlike Wangel’s proposal of a life provided for, the Stranger is offering Ellida a life shared together, a life that she may choose and determine the course of.

If Irigaray’s notions of sexuality are applied to Ibsen’s text, one can recognise the Stranger as a constituted vessel for Ellida. The Stranger holds on to Ellida because he “cannot do otherwise” (119); he believes that they belong to each other and thereby creates

himself and the ship that they will travel on as a stable place for Ellida by asking her to come with him of "her own free will" (80). By allowing Ellida to choose for herself, the Stranger has motivated her to contemplate what she desires, to belong and to have freedom of choice, longings that seem unsatisfiable in the home of Wangel and his family.

The desire for freedom of choice develops when the Stranger arrives and offers Ellida a chance to decide a new life. Suddenly, the opportunity to decide for herself, a privilege that Wangel has never offered Ellida, consumes and motivates her to question her relationship with Wangel and the basis of autocracy that it was built on, "I did not come away with you of my own free will" (99). The arrival of the Stranger forces Ellida to recognise that her desire for free will must be actualised in order to determine her future, with or without the Stranger:

Yes, I must be free to choose. Choose one way or the other. I must be able to let him go away alone...or to go with him (101).

Ellida has realised that her seemingly unsatisfiable desires to find a stable place and have free will are embodied in the Stranger and his offer to join him. The Stranger is depicted as a personification of the sea and the powerful elements that have attracted Ellida, the unknown:

WANGEL. How much do you know here? Absolutely nothing. Not even who he is...Or what he is.

ELLIDA [*stares unseeingly*]. That is true. That is what makes it so awesome...That is why I feel I cannot hold back from it (101).

The unknown symbolises discovery and the possibility for change, a new life and a place where Ellida is needed, as she tells Wangel, "it's to him I feel I belong" (103). But Ellida's love for Wangel is obviously deep, as she searches for a reason to stay - responsibility. Responsibility means a life shared equally, with Ellida answerable to her own decisions, rather than Wangel deciding and governing her every move. Wangel misunderstands Ellida's "craving for the unattainable...for the limitless, for the infinite" (120), as a

representation of a quest for personal freedom and escape, rather than perceive her longing as a plea for intimacy and shared responsibilities. By pushing Ellida away and granting her freedom from “all things that are mine” (121), Wangel has paradoxically welcomed her into a new life of equality and mutual understanding, thereby diminishing the paralysing inhibitions of the family, allowing Wangel and Ellida to devote time to each other, *their* memories and *their* two children (122).

The initial contractual marriage between Ellida and Wangel appears analogous to the relationship that develops between Arnholm and Bolette. Like Ellida, Bolette is consumed and motivated by desire: desire for freedom and knowledge, and to discover, as Bolette says, “a place for myself somewhere else” (72). Bolette is dissatisfied with her surroundings, emphasised by her fascination with geography (70) and the world ‘beyond the carp pond’, feeling that the town where she lives is cut off from the rest of the world (70). The complacency that Bolette attaches to her overwhelming longing to escape, “I suppose I was created to stay here in the pond” (73), is disputed by Arnholm’s insistence that the path to a better life “depends entirely upon you...whether you go or whether you don’t” (110). Arnholm’s encouraging words propel Bolette’s desire to escape, “to get away” (71), a desire that Arnholm believes he can satisfy by concurrently satisfying his own egocentric need to find a wife at the embarrassing age of thirty-seven (42). By reluctantly accepting Arnholm’s proposal with the guarantee that Bolette “shall see something of the world” (114), Ellida’s mistake of accepting marriage as a means of provision is mirrored in Bolette’s actions.

In the commentary to *The Lady From the Sea*, Ibsen writes of the longing for the “great world outside” (*Oxford Ibsen*, 449), for a share in the future that exists beyond the mountains and fjords. Such a longing is epitomised in the character of Bolette and her desire to escape and discover knowledge. However, Lebowitz proposes, “the Great World which beckons us to an innocent coming into fullness of being, love, and power has been dismissed as a sadistic siren of delusion” (1). A conflict occurs between the great world of liberation and the small world that sustains duty and obligation, as Bolette envelops the idea of freedom but remains tied to limitations and duty by agreeing to be the wife of a man that she does not love.

Is the end of the play an acceptance of human defeat, an endurance of obligatory duty and a sacrifice of individuality, or is the conclusion an affirmation of love and marriage? Velissariou argues that Ellida's "decision to stay with Wangel and integrate herself into the family confirms the defeat of her search for individuality" (74). This argument is especially valid when discussing the conversation between Ellida and Ballested, as Ellida comes to realise the truth in Arnholm's evolutionary theories:

ELLIDA [*smiling gravely*]. Well, Mr. Arnholm, do you remember what we were talking about yesterday? Once a creature has settled on dry land, there's no going back to the sea. Nor to a life that's linked with the sea.

BALLESTED. Why, that's just like the case of my mermaid! Except for one difference. The mermaid dies. On the other hand, men and women can acclaim— acclimatise themselves (123-4).

Ellida's individuality is seemingly threatened as she comes to realise that her longing for the sea as a haven, or symbol of a place where she once belonged, cannot be fulfilled. She must either die like the mermaid or acclimatise and make the most of her surroundings. But rather than accept acclimatisation as a renunciation of her individuality, Ellida affirms her equal status in her marriage by confirming that one can only acclimatise "if they are free" (124). This attestation of freedom and equality demonstrates that the relationship between Wangel and Ellida is not based on the evolutionary need to adapt but, rather, on the desire to discover a place to belong to.

The relationship between Arnholm and Bolette is far more ambiguous than that of Ellida and Wangel. Evidently, their engagement has been based, not on shared love and affection, but mutual self-seeking desires. But such a foundation need not result in defeat and the ultimate sacrifice of individuality, as Bolette ensures that her suspected unhappy marital life will be compensated by a life rich with knowledge and travel, never worrying "about having to make ends meet" (115). Obviously, Arnholm's stable financial situation can be of much benefit to the young Bolette, desperate in her desire for freedom. However, we are unable to determine the outcome of this mutually satisfying, yet seemingly

emotionally and individually destructive relationship, as Ibsen masterfully illustrates the multidimensional consequences of desire as a motivating and consuming impetus.

Chapter Three

Hedda Gabler

Hedda Gabler is perhaps the most complex and demanding of Ibsen's characters. She is a woman on a quest for freedom, an unrelenting search for the essence that will complete her and allow her to be "Hedda Gabler". The desire that consumes Hedda, and essentially leads to her downfall, is a product of her past, of the life Hedda once experienced when she was the daughter of General Gabler. Arthur Miller comments on how Ibsen creates the past of his characters in a most dynamic way, as the present should be "comprehended with wholeness, as a moment in a flow of time, and not - as with so many modern plays - as a situation without roots" (227). In the four plays that this thesis examines, Miller's comment is notably applicable. The past comes back to haunt the present in *The Master Builder* and *The Lady from the Sea*, or to control generations in *Rosmersholm*. Yet it is in *Hedda Gabler* that the past manufactures and determines the present, as Hedda struggles to create an environment that is to be a reproduction of her previous life.

As Lemaire argues in her book, *Jaques Lacan*, Lacan believes that lack precedes desire (Lemaire, 162), that desire occurs because an object has been lost and the human instinct is to replace the lost object. Lack creates a desire or wish for what has already passed, but that moment or object can never be substituted and consequently, satisfaction is eluded. Evidently, Hedda's desire is to be free, from marital union and duties. To experience such freedom Hedda reverts to her past, by recreating and introducing her past life within the present. Recreation of the past in order to feel satisfied and complete is a futile action, as Lacan notes that lack will always be felt as an "irreversible incompleteness" (Lemaire, 162). For Hedda, the desire for freedom can never be realised when it exists as a recreation of past occurrences, of the affluent and liberal life Hedda experienced as the daughter of General Gabler. In trying to reproduce her past, Hedda only generates emotional turmoil and the destruction of others' livelihood by manipulating the courage and freedom that the other characters possess, as a means of substitution for her own inability.

Rosalind Coward proposes that “female dissatisfaction is constantly recast as desire, as desire for something more, as the perfect reworking of what has already gone before - dissatisfaction displaced into desire for the ideal” (13). This idea that female discontent is replaced with desire and longing applies to Hedda (and aptly pertains to Ellida in *The Lady From the Sea*) and her attempts to create a life which reflects that of her past. It is the “perfect reworking” of the past that is to become a representation of Hedda’s desired ideal life; a life lived in freedom, yet an embodiment of control and decorum. Unsatisfied with her ‘new’ life as a married woman, Hedda attempts to construct a life that is to depict her past and her future. Such an attempt is recognised from the beginning of the play as the audience views a portrait of “a handsome, elderly man in the uniform of a general” (171). This portrait of Hedda’s father represents power that is synonymous with the status of a General: respected, dignified and controlled. It is this power that Hedda aspires to; to be in control of herself and others, yet at the same time, free from any obligations that bind her. Evidently, “Hedda’s position as daughter seems to offer her a freedom that her roles of wife and especially mother later deny her” (Finney, 156). As the daughter of the General, Hedda lives in a domain of male power and strength, an environment that Hedda has become accustomed to.

This atmosphere of male power and freedom may account for Hedda’s obsession with Lovborg and his decadent behaviour in a “world that [Hedda] isn’t supposed to know anything about” (223). Associating with Lovborg allows Hedda to feel free. A parallel between the past and the present is created as Hedda and Lovborg share intimacies behind the photo album, a scene reminiscent of Hedda’s youth:

LOVBORG. When I came up to your father’s in the afternoons...And the General used to sit by the window, reading the papers...his back towards us...

HEDDA. And we sat in the corner sofa...

LOVBORG. Always with the same magazine in front of us...

HEDDA. Yes...for want of an album (222).

To live vicariously through Lovborg's tales of debauchery thrilled Hedda as their secret companionship allowed her some freedom. But Lovborg thought their relationship was based on love and a desire to absolve his sordid actions (223), unaware that Hedda must feed off the courage of others in order to execute her own desire for liberation from boredom. Lovborg's assumption that their companionship was a guise for the "lust for life" (224) that Hedda felt, compels Hedda to assert her control, and tells Lovborg, "don't assume any such thing!" (224). Hedda's cowardice prevented any consummation of her sexual feelings for Lovborg, as the availability of a window into the morally decadent world that Lovborg revelled in was too important for Hedda to jeopardise by giving in to temptation and consequent scandal.

Hedda's effort to fashion a home that is to be a perfect adaptation of her past begins immediately upon her arrival, with the indicative portrait of the General the first personal belonging to have found a place in the villa. Hedda's immediate actions are further accentuated when Berte tells Miss Tesman about Hedda's behaviour the previous night, "Gracious...all the things the young mistress wanted unpacked before she could get off to bed" (171-72). By insisting on unpacking her belongings immediately, especially when the steamer had arrived so late (171), Hedda is perceived as uncomfortable in her new house and quite desperate to deny the environment of the 'newlyweds' home', as Berte's dialogue insinuates that Hedda's behaviour is unusual. In contrast, Tesman unpacks the following morning as he enters the room "*carrying an open, empty suitcase*" (173), accentuating the factor that Hedda's and Tesman's actions and thoughts never appear to coincide. The disagreeable relationship between Hedda and Tesman is elucidated in the following conversation between Aunt Jule and Berte.

Whilst visiting the newlyweds in the morning, Miss Tesman notices that the chair covers have been removed and questions Berte on their disappearance:

MISS TESMAN. But what's this, Berte...why on earth have you done that? Taken all the loose covers off?

BERTE. The lady told me to do it. She doesn't like loose covers on the chairs, she said.

MISS TESMAN. But will they be coming in here... I mean for everyday?

BERTE. That's what it sounded like. The lady, that is. As for himself...
the doctor...he didn't say anything (173).

This scene between Berte and Miss Tesman portrays the relationship between not only Hedda and Tesman, but also Hedda and the Tesman family. Whether Tesman requires the reception room for his everyday use is irrelevant to Hedda, for this room is where Hedda will receive guests and entertain. As Hedda realises that her desire for freedom is static, she must have something to "pass the time", a phrase which presupposes that Hedda will execute her wish to be free, and, until this time comes, she will amuse herself with guests who will feed her desire for respect and admiration.

Hedda's attitude toward Miss Tesman seems spiteful and impudent, as by removing the chair covers that Miss Tesman has arranged, Hedda is refusing the effort that has been made to pattern the home of 'Mr and Mrs Tesman', a refusal both selfish and yet, at the same time, understandable and even permissible. Patricia Spacks observes that "it is not hard to sympathise with Hedda, however much one condemns her brutality toward the old lady: the audience, or reader, too, can easily feel that Aunt Julianne is eager to worm her way into the lives of others, that she has a strong *potentiality* of subtle dominance, in a peculiarly feminine way" (161). Miss Tesman can hardly fathom the idea that the chairs will be used everyday, but without covers to protect them, suggesting that Miss Tesman, and most certainly Berte too, believe the household's ideas to be effective and superior to Hedda's notions of domesticity. Within the first few moments of the play, the audience can recognise that Hedda has moved into an environment that is controlled by the Tesman family and their principles, a domain which Hedda must immediately challenge if she is to succeed in effectuating her desire for freedom and control.

It is the behavioural differences between Hedda and Tesman that allow the audience to recognise the different values that each embrace. Tesman responds affectionately to Aunt Jule with physical contact, as he converses with her whilst "*patting her cheek*" (175) or "*embracing her*" (179). In contrast, Hedda cannot bring herself to give Miss Tesman a kiss when they meet (183) and can barely endeavour to call her 'Aunt' (184). Such behavioural differences indicate the different ethos that Hedda and Tesman represent. By demonstrating physical affection, Tesman is perceived as sympathetic and unaffected,

whilst Hedda's refusal to communicate on familiar and affectionate terms, manifests an inimical and brusque personality. It is family contact and respect of others that Tesman values, evident in his attempt to piece together Lovborg's manuscript that "would have made his name immortal" (260). Stein Olsen refers to the values that Tesman upholds, as the "tesmanesque ethos" (596), an ethos or way of life represented by good natured and simple people, including, not only Tesman, but Aunt Julie and Aunt Rina, Berte and Thea Elvsted. By introducing contrastable characters, the audience can recognise how such differences in the temperament and behaviour of each character motivate Hedda's desire for escape, as it is Hedda that holds the opposing values in an environment that is bound by the "tesmanesque ethos".

The character of Thea Elvsted performs a most informing role when discussing Hedda and her opposition to the Tesman philosophy. Hedda wants to be free from duties and responsibilities, marital and domestic obligations, yet, by marrying Tesman, Hedda has placed herself in the exact position she is trying to escape. According to Hedda, she had "danced [herself] tired" (206), and found that marriage was indeed imminent for a woman of twenty-nine. It is in Thea, who is "*a couple of years younger than Hedda*" (185), that Hedda recognises what is occurring in the society around her, with Thea already married for five years. Obviously the differences between Hedda and Thea do not end here. Thea is described in the stage directions as notably feminine and attractive, with extremely abundant and fair hair (185), whilst Hedda's features are considerably darker than Thea's, with cold grey eyes and hair that is an attractive brown "*but not particularly ample*" (179). Thea represents what Hedda believes is expected of *her* - femininity, innocence and to be married at an early age, the attributes that Hedda despises. By illustrating the contrasting qualities of these two characters, one can recognise that Thea seems a more suitable match for Tesman.

The marriage between Hedda and Tesman is obviously one of convenience, as Hedda admits that at the age of twenty-nine it seemed foolish to refuse the offer of marriage proposed by Tesman: "when he came along and was so pathetically eager to be allowed to support me...I don't really see why I shouldn't let him?" (207). Tesman shows just as little passion toward their marriage, with Hedda more of a prize than a wife, "I dare say there are one or two of my good friends who wouldn't mind being in my shoes" (175). In fact,

Tesman does not know Hedda at all; Judge Brack has more insight into Hedda's feelings than does her husband. Brack suggests that Hedda insults Miss Tesman and her hat because she is not happy with her own life (210), whilst Tesman continues to dote on Hedda and encourage her to be more like the other women in his life, "the devoted, sacrificing, adoring old aunts and nurses" (Hardwick, 58). Hedda will never be part of the Tesman family, and Tesman's constant plea that Hedda try to treat the members of his family as though they were her own, only enforces the idea that Tesman is completely ignorant of the woman he has just married and her pursuit for liberation.

In *Women in Modern Drama*, Finney develops the idea that "Hedda's death restores the proper coupling: Tesman is reunited with Thea, to whom he is much more suited, leaving us with the expectation that not only Lovborg's manuscript or metaphorical child but also Tesman's literal child will be resurrected - with Thea as its new mother" (162). Thea, despite the abandonment of her husband's children, has more maternal instinct than Hedda because Thea can devote her life to something and someone beyond herself. The manuscript is often referred to as a "child", something that both Thea and Lovborg created, "Thea's soul was in that book" (249). It was the metaphorical child that completed Thea, for without the shared passion of creating Thea declares that her life now lacks meaning (246). This passion for creating and experiencing something beyond the individual does not apply to Hedda, an obvious reason for the failed connection between Hedda and Tesman, as Hedda has no interest in or respect for other people's passions. This is illuminated when Hedda insists that the manuscript, which holds such meaning for others, is "only a book" (249). Thea will supplant the place of Hedda, a place that Hedda attempted to, but never managed to occupy, for Tesman needs a wife who will adhere to the Tesman family ethos, not one who challenges it. The Tesman family becomes truly complete when Tesman offers Thea a place to stay:

I don't think it's good for her to see us at this melancholy task. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Elvsted...you'll have to move into Aunt Julle's. Then I'll come up in the evenings. And then we can sit and work there. Eh? (268).

Thea and Tesman move toward the future as they revive the 'lost' manuscript, by taking over the space that Hedda attempted to infiltrate with her own past. As the play draws to a close, Hedda's desperate struggle to create an atmosphere that reflected her, and not the home of 'The Tesmans', is completely destroyed. The new couple significantly move into the reception room to continue their regeneration of the manuscript, as Tesman asks Hedda, "do you think we may be able to sit at your desk for a bit?" (264). Hedda's role of wife and mother-to-be thus becomes obsolete with the introduction of Thea Elvsted into the Tesman family. By replacing Hedda, Thea has essentially allowed Hedda's desire for freedom to be fulfilled, but Hedda lacks the courage to live this life of freedom:

Oh courage...oh yes! If only one had that. Then life might be liveable, in spite of everything (225).

Hedda refuses to live with courage, rather she chooses to die courageously and end the struggle for satisfied desire.

Unlike Hedda, Thea has the courage to act, by defying convention and expectations when she leaves her husband and stepchildren to pursue her happiness and freedom with Lovborg. As Thea states, "I didn't think there was anything else I could do" (193). Discontented with domestic life and the role of mother that was assigned to her in marriage, Thea parallels Hedda's desire to escape marital and maternal duties. Rather than see Thea's actions as exemplary of what Hedda could achieve, Hedda despises Thea for her act of courage and her dismissal of others reactions:

Oh, if only you knew how destitute I am. And you're allowed to be so rich! I think I'll burn your hair off after all (231).

Because, unlike Thea, Hedda cannot pursue her desire; her ultimate fear of defying convention and the subsequent scandal prevents her. Belsey states that,

desire, even when it is profoundly conventional, is at the same time the location of a resistance to convention. It demonstrates that people want something more (7).

Hedda despises the conventional role of woman as wife/mother, yet simultaneously perceives no other alternative to this role, because she needs the guarantee of a respected and admired position.

This guarantee of respectability is represented by the train journey metaphor that Hedda and Brack create in Act Two. Hedda's determination to remain in the "compartment" and endure the "nuptial journey" (207) epitomises how social forces prevent Hedda from evading her position as wife/mother because "there's always someone there who'll..." (208). Brack immediately misinterprets Hedda's comment and completes the sentence:

BRACK. [*laughing*]...who'll look at your legs, you mean?

HEDDA. Exactly (208).

Hedda's affirmative response to Brack's suggestion portrays the evident relationship of sexual exploitation and blackmail that exists between these two characters. Brack's allusion to the idea of a "trusted and sympathetic friend" (208) climbing into the compartment and forming a triangle is not lost on Hedda. Brack's intentions do not include alleviating Hedda's boredom with lively conversation, but to sexually manipulate and dominate:

HEDDA. [*looks at him with a smile*]. So... you want to be the only cock in the yard, is that it?

BRACK. [*nods slowly and lowers his voice*]. Yes, that's what I want. And I'll fight for that end...with every means at my disposal.

HEDDA. [*her smile fading*]. You're quite a formidable person when it comes to the point.

BRACK. You think so?

HEDDA. Yes, I'm beginning to think so, now. And I'm content...so long as you don't have any sort of hold over me (243).

Hedda recognises how relentless Brack can be "when it comes to the point", to getting exactly what he wants, which is a relationship of sexual manipulation. But Hedda remains sure of her own ability to manipulate, exemplified in her relations with Tesman, Thea and Lovborg. Therefore, Hedda is momentarily content in the knowledge that Brack has no hold over her, a position later destroyed in the final act when Brack exploits Hedda's fear of scandal by promising to keep silent only if she remains at his mercy:

Subject to your will and your demands. No longer free! [*She gets up violently.*] No! That's a thought that I'll never endure! Never! (266).

Hedda refuses to succumb to blackmail and sexual deceit as a means of mitigating the boring and oppressive nature of her relationship with Tesman. It is not only the idea of becoming subordinate to the power of men, like Brack, that disgusts and mortifies Hedda, but also the certainty that "there's always someone there" (208) prevents Hedda from 'jumping out' of the compartment. How can Hedda satisfy her desire when her worst fear of scandal overwhelms her wish for freedom? If Hedda left Tesman the scandal would be unbearable because someone is always watching, a point that is illuminated when Brack speaks of the 'concealed' relationship that has evolved between Thea and Lovborg:

Oh good Heavens...we're not blind, my lady. Use your eyes! This Mrs. Elvsted person, she won't be leaving town in such a hurry (243).

Brack's use of the third person "we're" suggests that not only has Brack noticed the relationship, but so have many other people in town, or at least the people in society that matter, as "from now on every *decent* home will be closed to Ejlert Lovborg once again" (243), (my italics). Brack's speech obviously affects Hedda and provokes her to question what the people must think of Thea staying out all night and having Lovborg ask after her; Hedda inquires, "did they seem to be drawing any inferences at all?" (245). Lovborg then

worries that he may be tainting Thea's reputation, yet happens not to notice any unusual response to his questions about her. But Thea's reputation is not what concerns Hedda, rather it is Hedda's curiosity that motivates her to ask about the townspeople's reactions. Hedda consumes any information from the 'outside world' that relates to her desire to be free; if Thea can leave her husband and remain indifferent to gossip, "they'll just have to say what they please" (193), then Hedda needs to know about it. Hedda's fear that society and the "decent" homes will be turned against her, affirms her determination to ensure that the name and reputation of "Hedda Gabler" is not shattered in the eyes of the society that created her image.

Aunt Julle's conversation with Berte about the days when Hedda was unmarried and living with her father, illustrates the weight of the Gabler name:

Do you remember her riding along the road with her father? In that long black habit? And with a feather in her hat? (172)

Such a description seems unusually vivid, especially when Aunt Julle is remembering a time when Hedda was of no relation to her. It is clear that the society in which Hedda was brought up has adopted Hedda as a local representation of popularity and affluence. The Gabler name is established as a representation of dignity and decorum, an image that Hedda refuses to surrender in order to satisfy her desire for freedom. Rather, Hedda looks to execute her desire vicariously, as she interferes with and destroys the lives around her.

Maintaining independence and identity becomes extremely difficult for Hedda when pregnancy and childbirth are suggested, though never referred to explicitly. It is only via other characters' insinuations about 'filling out', Hedda's attempt at confiding in Tesman her current state (255) and her frantic movements of raising her arms and clenching her fists "as though in a frenzy" (183), that one can perceive the depth of Hedda's distressed emotional state which is, at least in part, the result of her pregnancy. In *Desire in Language*, Julia Kristeva explains the gestation period by arguing that

within the body, growing as a graph, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify

what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there". "I cannot realise it, but it goes on" (237).

Hedda's alienation from the experience that is taking place within her maternal body and the inability to control the growth of the persistent foetus, only further develops her anxiety and distress. The "fairy story" (210) of marriage, children and sympathetic Aunts is stifling and oppressive for someone like Hedda; this life will deny her the freedom she so desires. Freedom promises Hedda relief from responsibility, particularly the impending threat of motherhood.

It is perhaps in pregnancy that a loss of identity occurs, as Kristeva states that "the maternal body is the place of splitting" (238), where the identity and subject position of the mother becomes threatened through childbirth. Hedda fears such a loss, that she will become subject to pregnancy, a biological force that is impossible for Hedda to control. Yet, as Spacks suggests, motherhood could be an avenue of control and domination for Hedda, to "form the lives of others" (157), but Hedda understands too well that with motherhood is assigned responsibility, a duty that she vehemently refuses:

I've no aptitude for any such thing. No responsibilities for me, thank you! (213).

But Hedda's refusal to become a mother and accept responsibility is essentially futile; her suggested pregnancy is obviously advancing quickly as Tesman notes how Hedda has "filled out" (182). Hedda feels "*ill at ease*" (183), knowing that as the months progress the birth of the child she carries is nearing, "why yes...already it's...it's September" (183).

To secure her respected position in society, Hedda conformed to marriage and pregnancy. Miss Tesman is the first to insinuate that after six months on honeymoon surely there are some "prospects" to be spoken of (176), whilst Judge Brack pronounces what Hedda assumes society is thinking, "why shouldn't you, *like most other women*, have a natural aptitude for a vocation that...?" (213), (my italics). Hedda Gabler is experiencing motherhood as a controlling and societal force; it is a calling that 'most women', including Hedda, should respond to. It is motherhood as an 'institution' that "demands of women

maternal “instinct” rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realisation, relation to others rather than the creation of self” (Rich, 42). Rich’s thoughts on motherhood as an institution apply to Hedda’s position, as Brack determines that Hedda can be happy and fulfilled via the role of mother; to fill the void within her life Hedda must go through a “stirring experience” (212) and assume the sacred responsibility of motherhood. Hedda knows what society expects because she belongs to this society and expects no less from herself than she does of anyone else; Hedda will be a wife and mother but will despise and fight the recognition and acceptance of her roles. Freedom is not an option for Hedda; her frantic movements of clenching her fists, struggling to free herself from Aunt Jule’s embrace, passionately gripping Mrs Elvsted, or clenching her “*hands as though in desperation*” (255) are the very actions of a woman who realises that her desire will never be actualised. Only in death can Hedda Gabler be free.

Leclaire asserts that “it is the difference between the satisfaction obtained and the satisfaction sought which maintains [the] motive force” (Leclaire, 52, quoted in Lemaire, 169). Hedda receives fulfilment when Brack misinforms her of Lovborg’s ‘suicide’, as she believes that his death is “a really courageous act” (260), but after discovering that Lovborg’s death appears unintentional, Hedda is devastated and revolted that “everything I touch seems to turn into something mean and farcical” (263). The satisfaction that Hedda obtained by believing in Lovborg’s suicide is destroyed by the truth, illustrating that her desire to find courage in freedom is unfulfillable. This desire and the impossibility of its fulfilment motivate and drive Hedda toward the final search for courage and liberation in death. Nobody can deliver freedom to Hedda when her own fears and inadequacies impede the satisfaction of her desire.

Chapter Four

The Master Builder

The vision of heights and depths that this play encapsulates, with both literal and metaphorical meanings, is an illustration of the characters' desires and shortcomings. Solness' vision of himself as an elite, one chosen to procure what he desires is contradicted by his guilt for past actions and the fear of youth and retribution. It is via Hilde that Solness is urged to desire and create the impossible "castles in the air".

When the play begins, Solness is depicted as a man who has achieved his goals and desires; he has a very successful business with three employees, and despite being a "*man of mature years*" (358) he is still "*strong and vigorous*" (358). Solness is obviously sexually attractive to his employee Kaja Fosli, whom he flirts with upon his arrival at the office. His skill as a master architect is seemingly in demand, with clients asking after him and the plans that he has promised them. This picture of Solness as a physically and sexually powerful man suggests that he has reached the height of his career, recognised as a positive affirmation by the audience. But Solness is not content with the knowledge that his reputation is so firmly established, his high position only creates a fear that he will be pushed aside; the higher he reaches the further he must fall. This consuming fear of becoming obsolete seems to be a product of Solness' past and the action he took to achieve success, a factor first addressed when Brovik is confronting Solness about Ragnar's future:

SOLNESS. But he hasn't really learnt anything...thoroughly, I mean.
Except how to draw.

BROVIK. You hadn't learnt much about the business either, when you were working for me. But that didn't stop you from launching out. [*Breathing with difficulty.*] Or from getting on. You went and left me standing... and a lot of other people as well.

SOLNESS. Well, things just ran my way (361).

Brovik's accusation that Solness, like Ragnar, had little knowledge of the business when first starting out, enforces the threat of youth that Solness is so afraid of. Solness' fear of being superseded by Ragnar, "I! - Withdraw in favour of your son!" (362), is a likely reality, because Solness supplanted Brovik and his business as he fought to exist in a competitive environment.

Ronald Gaskell proposes that "man, like other animals, [is] a finite creature whose acts are largely determined by hereditary, by biological drives and by an environment in which he must struggle to exist" (18). The struggle for completeness, or the ideal, in a demanding environment is an action which now comes back to haunt Solness in the guise of youth and consequent retribution:

The turn is coming. I can sense it. I feel it getting nearer. Somebody or other is going to demand: Make way for me! And then all the others will come storming up, threatening and shouting: Get out of the way! Get out of the way! (375).

But this inevitable struggle for the ideal existence demands sacrifices, sacrifices that Solness willingly made but which now torment and overwhelm his "fragile conscience" (412). Solness' conscience is penetrated by guilty thoughts and emotions, for he believes that the kind fate that has been delivered to him results in the destruction of others and their vocation. Solness later tells Hilde that the "helpers and servants" (411), who make these sacrifices on his behalf, cause him eternal pain, as though he had a wound that never heals but "burns and throbs" (412). But when Solness is offered the chance to allow Brovik to die a happy man by assuring Ragnar's ability as an architect, he tells Brovik "you must die as best you can" (363). Solness' contradictory nature cripples his relationships with others, especially with his wife Aline, as Solness reasons that by allowing Aline to think that he and Kaja have entered into an affair, he is "paying off a tiny instalment on a huge immeasurable debt" (372). If Aline thinks ill of her husband, then Solness' guilty thoughts for past actions can be alleviated. But, whilst "paying off the debt" for his past injury to Aline (willing the fire that acted as a catalyst to the death of their children) he is simultaneously causing her more misery by allowing his wife to think he is in love with

another woman. Solness, although aware that his wife has been continually suffering the loss of her children and family home for the last “twelve or thirteen years” (374), is blind to her unhappiness that has been induced by having a younger woman around him. This is evident in the following scene when Solness so unthinkingly insults Aline:

SOLNESS. Well...at least she's had a fair amount of training over the last two years. She's also pleasant and willing in every way.

MRS. SOLNESS. Yes, *that* must be very agreeable...

SOLNESS. It is. Especially when one doesn't exactly enjoy a glut of that kind of thing.

MRS. SOLNESS. [*mildly reproachful*]. How can you say that, Halvard?

SOLNESS. Oh no, no, Aline dear. You must forgive me (368).

By holding on to the desire to be significant and successful beyond human capacity, Solness is continually hurting and disabling those around him, a sacrifice he finds unbearable, yet constantly endures to reach his own fulfilment.

When Solness was granted the opportunity to be the master builder, due to the fire that destroyed Aline's family home, Aline was robbed of her vocation for “building children's souls” (406), a theft that Solness believes he is responsible for. Solness is “unable to bear the responsibility for his emancipation” (Ystad, 77), as he now lives in an atmosphere stifled by guilt and death, “chained alive” (428) to Aline, a woman drained of all joy and feeling in her life. By effectuating his desire for artistic beauty and success, Solness sacrificed human happiness, a sacrifice he is unable to accept the consequences of:

All this I somehow have to make up for. Pay for. Not in money. But in human happiness. And not with my own happiness alone. But also with others'. Don't you see that, Hilde! That's the price my status as an artist has cost me - and others. And every single day I have to watch this price being paid for me anew. Over and over again - endlessly! (406).

The desire for success has been fulfilled, but the relentless burden of guilt creates conflict, for Solness is instinctively driven to surpass limitations, a drive further motivated by Hilde.

Hilde personifies the desire for the impossible, to reach for the heights and discover what lies beyond. The metaphorical quest of exceeding the heights is literalised by Hilde's appearance:

She wears walking clothes, with her skirt hitched up, a sailor's collar open at the neck, and a small sailor hat on her head. She has a rucksack on her back, a plaid in a strap, and a long alpenstock (375).

Hilde's casual, if not unconventional attire, of walking clothes, hitched skirt and sailor outfit, portrays a vibrant and animated young woman, an attitude especially evident when greeting Solness with "*shining and happy*" (375) eyes, or laughing at Solness for not recognising her (375). The mountaineering gear that Hilde carries, particularly the alpenstock, illustrates how Hilde is literally prepared for climbing the heights. She has arrived at the precise moment that Solness insists the youth he is so wary of will come beating on his door. Yet, the differences between Hilde and the other younger characters, manufactures Hilde as a new hope, an emblem of youth that should not be feared. Ragnar and Kaja, although young, are portrayed as less vital and exuberant than Hilde. Ragnar is in his thirties, yet has a "*slight stoop*" (357), whilst Kaja, in her early twenties is described as "*slightly built*" and "*delicate looking*" (357). In contrast, Hilde is "*of medium height, lithe, of slim build*" and "*slightly tanned by the sun*" (375). Such a contrast between Hilde's agile and energetic appearance and the fragile figures of Ragnar and Kaja, positions Hilde as an opposing representative of "youth against youth" (389). Hilde will be the youthful figure who will help the master builder realise his ultimate desire for greatness, represented in his climb to the top of the house spire.

From the moment Hilde arrives she places herself in a position of control and power; she will not indulge Solness' suggestion that she be the new bookkeeper, exclaiming, "No, thank you - we're not having any of that!" (380). Hilde manipulates Solness by filling the emptiness that the death of the twins has left, as Solness offers one of the nurseries for Hilde to stay in, asserting that "now *you* can be the child while you're

here" (378), to which she responds, "For tonight, yes" (379). Hilde announces the following day that she slept "like a child in a cradle" (396), only emphasising her intention of manipulating Solness' trust in her. Such a manipulation of trust will allow Hilde to see her desire satisfied, the desire to live a passionate and thrilling life.

Solness is the key to Hilde's fulfilment, for it is the glorified status of Solness as 'The Master Builder' that she has built her life dreams around. As she tells Solness, "if you could build the highest church tower in the world, I thought to myself, then sure you'd be able to arrange some kind of kingdom or other" (386). Perhaps the inconclusive incident at Lysanger, where Hilde claims Solness kissed and promised her a kingdom, is a young girl's fantasy that provided a means of escapism from a home that was nothing more than a cage (429). Chamberlain contends that an unambiguous evaluation of this recalled scene is impossible "when both parties agree to its desirability" (174). Solness' initial denial of Hilde's claim is refuted by his confession that he must in fact have "willed it...wished it...desired it" (384). Perhaps events similar to what Hilde remembers did occur; the master builder paid the adolescent daughter of the doctor some much needed attention and from this act a sexual and emotional fantasy for escape grew, or, Solness may have treated the thirteen year old Hilde as an object of desire and attraction. This recalled climactic moment is evidently bound by ambiguities, allowing the multidimensional nature of these two characters to be expounded.

Hilde reminds Solness of a time when he was at his greatest. She found his climb to the top of the tower "terribly exciting" (382), whilst others, including Aline, can hardly believe he achieved such an impossible feat:

HILDE. But I've seen him myself right at the top of a high church tower.

MRS. SOLNESS. Yes, I've heard people say that. But it's quite impossible.

SOLNESS [*vehemently*]. Impossible...yes, impossible! But I did it all the same (420).

Hilde, unlike Aline, indulges Solness' thoughts of greatness and achieving the impossible, as Solness' strength enables Hilde's desire for a passionate and powerful life to be fulfilled.

The ability of these two characters to indulge in each other's desires demonstrates the stimulating, yet mutually parasitic nature of their relationship.

Both characters motivate and feed off the desires of the other; Hilde insistently tells Solness that "nobody but you should be allowed to build" (400), a thought that Solness is obsessed by and wishes to achieve (400). By encouraging and motivating Solness' desire to be the only master builder, Hilde is simultaneously engendering her own desire for passion and power. Both Hilde and Solness consider themselves superior, Solness having already demonstrated his 'gift' to will, when telling Doctor Herdal that Kaja came to Solness because he wished and willed it to happen (371). Solness questions Hilde about whether she believes that certain people are chosen and gifted with a power to execute what they desire, to which she responds, "If that is so, we'll see some day...if I am one of the chosen" (411). Hilde is especially forthright in her objective to see the master builder great, and have faith in the strength of mankind to surpass limitations. Yet, as much as these two characters believe in their ability to fulfil their desires, both are guided by their conscience. Solness appears to be afflicted with what Hilde terms a "fragile conscience" (412), he can not accept the consequences of his actions. Hilde, however, considers her conscience to be of a robust nature; she is a "bird of prey" (415), ready to take what she wants and hold it firm. Hilde's relationship with Solness depicts this predatory nature, as she arrives at Solness' house to claim her spoil. However, as the relationship between Hilde and Solness grows, Hilde also develops a relationship with Aline and discovers more about the inability of this husband and wife to amend their crippled existence. After conversing with Aline in Act Three, Hilde decides she wants to leave, protesting that, "I can't hurt someone I *know*!" (428). Hilde, like Solness, has the desire to achieve the impossible and surpass all limitations, but the fragile conscience is also a common trait.

The castle in the air that Hilde urges Solness to build is recognised as a symbol of Solness' desire for immortality. Solness exudes a youthful and active attitude when contrasted with Knut Brovik who "*is a thin old man, with white hair and beard*" (357), and Aline who "*looks thin and drawn, with traces of former beauty*" (365). Despite Solness' mature age, this comparison with other aged characters only affirms his strength and domination. But Solness needs constant affirmation of his status and great ability, forever

frightened that youth will bring about change and retribution, a change that the master builder will not accept:

But I'm never going to back down! I'll never give way to anybody! Never of my own free will. Never in this world will I do *that*! (363).

In an attempt to become immortal and live a perpetual existence, Solness strives for the impossible, as "the endless quest for self-and-world completion is itself the motion and emotion of human existence" (Halm, 23). In struggling to find self-completion Solness vows to build a castle in the air "with a real foundation" (432). This proves to be the most impossible of Solness' desires, for a life built on impossible desires and dreams can never be solid, or have a "real foundation". Like the impossibility of a solid castle in the air, the relationship between Hilde and Solness exists on a figurative level. Each needs the other to fulfil their desires for greatness and immortality, an aspiration that consumes and leads to the death and destruction of the central character.

This ego driven desire to achieve self-completion at any cost, relates to the theories that Nietzsche offers on the will to power. Nietzsche suggests that the passions and desires of men must not be annihilated, but controlled, as one can utilise the desire for power to strive for freedom (307). He terms this striving for emancipation "self preservation", an instinct that "insists upon our opponents maintaining their strength - all it requires is to become master of them" (291). To effectuate one's desire for freedom and power, the opposition to the individual must be manipulated, an action that Halvard Solness willingly undertakes by using the strength and intelligence of his opponents to further his career. As he tells Doctor Herdal:

But that didn't suit my book at all. I needed Ragnar myself. And the old man, too. He's so extraordinarily clever at working out stresses and strains and cubic contents...and all that damned rigmarole, you know (371).

Solness utilises those around him to satisfy his egotistical desire for greatness, mirroring the Nietzschean philosophy of the 'will to power'.

The individual is compelled by the fundamental desire for personal power and freedom; as Brustein notes, "the individual is revolutionary man, superior to all confining social, political, or moral imperatives, who finds his purpose in the pursuit of his own personal truth" (38). Solness believes that he is the individual who has been gifted with such a will to power, a freedom to exercise his command and consequently catapult his career:

If old Knut Brovik had owned the house, it would never have burnt down quite so conveniently for him. I'm quite certain of that. He doesn't know how to call upon these helpers...nor upon the servants, either (411).

But as Solness acknowledges himself as a secular elite, so too does he realise that his individualist attitude conflicts with his "fragile conscience" (412). Tornqvist terms the battle in Solness' mind a "conflict between self-assertion and renunciation, between individualism and altruism" (134). Solness claims that he renounced building churches for the greater good of humankind, by building houses that were,

warm, cheerful, comfortable homes, where fathers and mothers and their children could live together, secure and happy, and feeling that it's good to be alive. And more than anything to belong to each other - in great things and in small (405).

This seemingly altruistic effort to create homes for human beings is contradicted by Solness' individualist attitude about who may live in the homes that he has devoted his life to. Even the most "substantial" (359) or decent and respectable people that Brovik recommends Solness create a house for are disregarded, as Solness declares, "I don't want anything to do with these strangers" (359). The instinct to survive in a competitive environment overwhelms Solness, and motivates his quest to be great and powerful. Yet underlying these feelings of superiority and elitism is a fragile and weak conscience, unable to bear the responsibility of actualised desire.

The will to power presents itself to Solness, and he accepts, as he brings about the downfall of others' livelihood. However, due to Solness' contradictory and equivocal temperament, he is unwilling to accept the consequences of his motivated desires, and realise that "power, whether in the hands of a god or of a man, is always understood to consist in the ability to harm as well as to help" (Nietzsche, 286). This inability to comprehend and accept the strength of his will is portrayed in Solness' climactic climb to the top of the house tower. The vertigo that Solness suffers may be regarded as a metaphor for his weak conscience; just when he reaches the top of the tower, or the ultimate pinnacle of his career, where he can tell the "Almighty One" (439) that he will now devote his life to the impossible castles in the air - he falls. Suddenly the impossible climb that Solness once achieved at Lysanger does not seem so possible, as his affirmation to build castles in the air on a firm foundation is eclipsed by his ultimate fear of judgement and retribution.

The equivocal denouement of *The Master Builder*, a customary technique employed in the three other plays discussed, positions the audience to view the death and destruction of the master builder as both a defeat and a triumph. Ibsen's ability to create characters and their language in terms of up and down, heights and depths, reinforces the opposition of triumph and defeat that the climax poses. The dialogue differentiates amongst the characters, as Aline insists Solness stay "down below" (442) for his own safety, while Ragnar wants to see the master builder "stay down" (442) and experience the misery of being at the base of the industry. Hilde assures Ragnar that "[Solness] means to get to the top" (443), the term 'top' operating with a double meaning: to reach the top of the tower and to remain at the height of his profession. Solness' climb and subsequent fall are simultaneously perceived by the audience as an act of obstinate folly, for Solness knows that he suffers extreme vertigo yet insists on climbing the tower, and an act of mesmerising triumph, as Hilde morbidly relishes his glorious effort, as she cries out

[*with a kind of quiet, bewildered triumph*]. But he got right to the top. And I heard harps in the air. [*Waves the shawl upwards and shouts with a wild intensity.*] My...my...master builder! (445).

Whilst a voice calls out from the quarry, “the master builder is dead!” (445), Hilde contradictorily recognises triumph in Solness’ death, accenting the fact that he made it to the top. Such a contrasting perspective confronts the audience with a reinforcement of the ambiguity of desire and its consequences, unable to determine if striving to fulfil desire and surpass limitations is fundamentally a triumphant act or a portrayal of inevitable destruction.

Conclusion

The plays discussed in this thesis depict characters consumed and overwhelmed by desire; desire that eventually culminates in their death and destruction, except in *The Lady From the Sea*. But the strength of each play's conclusion suggests that in death and defeat there is triumph, just as in salvation there lies desolation.

The commonality of ambiguity demonstrates the power of desire and how the consequences can neither be determined as positive or negative, despite the 'tragic' or 'happy' endings. Even the 'happy' conclusion of *The Lady From the Sea* suggests a shadow of despair, as we are unable to conclude whether the characters have achieved fulfilment in their decisions. The other three plays portray the unhappy reality of the human condition - that the 'great world' of freedom, love and happiness is an illusion. True happiness is perhaps found in the life without ideals, as Ulrik Brendel from *Rosmersholm* pronounces, "living life without ideals is the great secret of practical success" (375). To eliminate desire for the ideal from the striving hearts of the protagonists is to simply exist, to never want more, to never long for the impossible, to endure the limitations of humanity. But this static and idle world is intolerable for the Ibsen protagonist, evidently driven by the primary desire for self-completion and fulfilment.

Despite the quest for fulfilment being inconclusive and remaining contradictory, some possibility of satisfied desire is apparent, as Ibsen introduces characters like Thea Elvsted, recognised as a reflection of Hedda's desired life, or the Stranger who represents the life of co-dependency that Ellida desires. But while these characters elicit images of possible satisfaction, verbal and visual elements in the play also produce the prospect of success and simultaneous failure. The poetry of heights and depths, the sea and the land, the past and the future, cowardice and courage, youth and age, operate concurrently as limitations and opportunities for satisfied desire. For Hedda finds courage in suicide, Solness discovers strength in defeat, Rosmer and Rebecca realise redemption in death and Ellida chooses to live a life of equality in a marriage based on autocracy. The multiplicity embodied in each of these plays challenges the presupposition that what the audience observes as a conclusion is definitive; that death equals destruction and tragedy, whilst choosing life equals happiness and salvation. For these plays contradict and oppose an

unequivocal reading, by negating the supposed truths and assumptions of human existence. Desire functions as misguided human will, as characters become obsessed with transcending the commonplace existence, unrelenting in their pursuit of the ideal. This resilience and motivation is both admirable and futile, as the vision of perfection becomes perverted and distorted in a world inhospitable to the plight of the individual.

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